RESTORATION REVIEW

The spread of Christianity would have been inconceivable had Jesus been born half a century earlier. As it was, the new faith entered the world at a time of peace unparalleled in history. The whole known world was for the first time under the effective control of one power — Rome. (Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, p. 13)

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Adventures of the Early Church . . .

WHEN THE TIME WAS RIPE

When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son. - Gal. 4:4

While the unique character of the Christian story is generally admitted, it nonetheless, like all other things in this world, took place in a given civilization and in a particular culture. By civilization is meant the world order at that time, with its rise and fall of nations, its way of life, its social institutions. By culture is meant the things of the mind, ideas and philosophies, education, art, music and architecture.

So, we are speaking of "the situation" or "the condition," what the Germans call the *sitz im leben*, that served as the context or the "home" for the beginning of the Christian faith. The above text says when all these things in civilization and culture were "just right," or as Phillips renders it "When the proper time came," God invaded history in a special way in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The phrase literally means "When the fullness of time came," as if to suggest that history was ripening for the great event that would satisfy a yearning that had burned in the human heart for centuries. History was fulfilling itself, tiptoeing up to the one event that would change the world forever, something like gently filling a jug up to the brim. Or like the shooting of a movie scene. *Ready! Camera!*

Even though the "movie" that followed was a miracle story, its setting was in earthen vessels. The producer may have been in heaven and the audience may have been angelic, as Eph. 3:10 would suggest, but the stage for the unfolding drama was what we now call "the ancient world" with all its stark and cruel reality. It was the world of Judea and the Herods and Rome and the Caesars.

So it was with the Old Testament story. The great nations and their emperors were drafted into the service of the God of heaven as if theirs was a special call. Cyrus the Mede is referred to in Scripture as "the anointed of the Lord" even when it acknowledges that he did not know the God who called him. And the wicked Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon is called "the Lord's battle ax," while the Assyrians are referred to as "the rod of my anger." When an ancient pharaoh had a dream he could not recall, which was part of the drama that made Joseph governor in Egypt, and when a Persian monarch assuaged his insomnia

by having the record of heroic deeds read to him, which was crucial to Esther saving the Jews from destruction, it was God at work manipulating events so as to fulfill his purposes.

It is evident that the unfolding drama of Scripture did not take place in a vacuum, but in the ongoing events of human history. God called Jeremiah even from his mother's womb "to be a prophet to the nations," and when Isaiah referred to God's mission in history he used such language as "the Lord will extend his hand a second time to recover the remnant which is left of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coast lands of the sea" (Is. 11:11). And so the Old Testament does not hesitate to affirm that "the Most High rules the kingdom of men, and gives it to whom he will" (Dan. 4:25).

It is not surprising, therefore, that God set in motion the Christian story by influencing the minds of pagan emperors of Rome. Luke begins at the beginning when writing to a Greek official: "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Lk. 2:1-2).

A decree from Rome calling for a census, the first of its kind, may appear as not particularly significant, but it was necessary to the script, for the Producer had to move a young maiden, pregnant with the Christ child eighty miles, from Nazareth in Galilee to Bethlehem in Judea, so that "the Ruler" destined to bring peace to all the world would be born in "the smallest of the villages of Judah" as foretold by the prophet Micah. There was something special about Micah's message, not only because he preached love, justice, and a humble walk with God as the essence of religion, but also because he held out hope in an age of despair that the great nations of the earth would one day be at peace, that they would beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and study war no more. It was a call for peaceful coexistence.

Micah did a very unusual thing. He based his hopeful message upon the conviction that "a ruler in Israel" would rise to bring peace to a decadent world. He went on to name the village, Bethlehem Ephrathah, the second term being its ancient name, as the place of origin for this new ruler. While other prophets spoke of a coming Messiah, only Micah, a man of the country, dared to name the place of his birth. The prophecy was "a sleeper" through the centuries, with little attention given to it. But the God of heaven, who always watches over his word to perform it, did not forget that the Christ was to be born in the city of David.

Augustus, who ruled Rome for 44 years, did far more to build the cradle for Christianity than to issue a decree that positioned the virgin Mary in Bethlehem at the right time. His name was really Octavian, but the senate proclaimed him Augustus because he transformed a republic into an empire and displaced war and decadence with peace and prosperity. They said of him that he found Rome a city of brick and turned it into a city of marble. He built temples, basilicas, libraries, theatres, roads, and along with it lowered taxes. In bringing peace to a large part of the world he was able to cut his army in half, but still he opened up travel routes and secured them against brigands by having guard stations along the way. Merchants could not only travel the world in peace but the evangels of the gospel as well. His rule of nearly half a century, longer than any other emperor, brought such peace as the world had not known for two centuries. He made the time ripe for the coming of the Christ, for the gospel could not have had free rein in a war-torn world.

But the emperor, whose reign is sometimes called “the Augustan Reformation,” did what few rulers ever attempt in that he tried to make the people good as well as happy, and moral revolutions are hard to come by. Rulers usually leave moral reform to saints and prophets. It was because of his influence that the people became more conscious of morals and religion, art and philosophy, law and order. He sought to revive such ancient ideals as character and courage. Many slaves were freed. He awarded family life and parentage in a world that had chosen childlessness through abortion, infanticide, and contraception. He encouraged the great writers in his empire, the likes of Livy, Virgil and Horace, to write in behalf of moral and religious reform.

While the senate in naming him Augustus assumed him to be more than a man even if less than a god, he was hardly an exemplary figure and as for religion he was no more than a skeptic. He gained his power by forcing the hand of Cleopatra, who ruled the riches of Egypt and who loved Mark Antony, Augustus’ rival. Once he had military leverage over her, he demanded that she kill Antony. She refused, but Antony, supposing his lover to be dead, mortally wounded himself. When he learned the report to be false, he made his way to her and died in her arms. Augustus, waiting outside with his army, allowed Cleopatra to bury her lover. She stood before Augustus to hear the terms he offered. Finding them unacceptable, she returned to her quarters, clad herself in her royal robes, and then put an asp to her breast and died.

And so Octavian became Augustus and built the Roman Empire with the wealth of Egypt —and thus prepared the world for Jesus Christ! It may strike us as strange that the God of heaven would use such means to accomplish His purposes, but we are to remember

that God was working within human history, and that is the stuff of history. Say what we will about their morals, the Greeks and the Romans were “tutors unto Christ,” as they are sometimes called, even when they were often homosexuals and gained their thrones through assassination.

His efforts less than realized, Augustus came to see that moral reform awaited a religious renaissance. He helped to set the tone, for in his time agnosticism lost its appeal and the people came to suspect what their poets had told them, that the fear of the gods is the youth of wisdom. Even the cynical Ovid yielded: “It is convenient that there should be gods, and that we should think they exist.” So a world empire was at least ready to hear the Christian message. And that empire had set in motion a long reign of peace, the *pax Romana* it was called, and they had built roads that stretched from one great city to another and secured them. The seas were safe from pirates. In a few years an apostle of Jesus Christ could “appeal to Caesar” and journey all the way to Rome under protective custody, with no obstacle but the weather. The Romans had ripened the time for God to send the star of Bethlehem.

But that is not all. Beside political unity, law and order, and international peace, the world also needed a unity of language. The official language was Latin, another gift of the Romans, but the common language of the people was Greek, bequeathed by the conquering armies of Alexander the Great generations earlier. These two languages, along with Aramaic, the vernacular of Palestinian Jews, were the languages that Pontius Pilate wrote above the Cross of Christ, and they were the two languages that communicated to an entire empire. The *koine* Greek was not the Greek of Sophocles or Plato, but of the common man, the housewife and her written recipe, the soldier and his letter home. For a time linguists were baffled by “biblical Greek,” supposing it to be some special “Holy Ghost lingo,” but it was soon discovered that it was so common as to be lost in the everyday life of an ancient people. While classical Greek could be found in ancient libraries, the *koine* Greek was to be found only in the writings of the common folk in the form of letters, diaries, recipes, etc., now called *papyri* (plural for *papyrus).*

And *this* was the Greek of the New Testament and the language of the gospel as it reached out all over the Graeco-Roman world. Adolph Deissmann, one of the linguists who searched these things out, found papyri from every century of the Christian era, which not only attests to the language of the New Testament but allows for a better definition of the words it uses.

Greek language and culture became so dominant that even the Jews scattered over the Greek world no longer used their native Hebrew or Aramaic, and they soon translated their Old Testament Scriptures into Greek, about 200 B.C. This translation is known as the Septuagint, and it became the Bible of the early church. While Greek ideas had some influence on Christian thought, such as the concept of the Logos, the *religious* influence was mostly Jewish. The Greeks, for instance, were radically polytheistic, while Judaism was adamantly monotheistic, and it was of course the conviction that "the Lord is one God" that became as much Christian as it was Jewish.

Indeed, the Jewish influence upon the early church was so extensive that we shall be aware of it throughout this series. The first Christian scriptures were Jewish. The first Christians were themselves Jewish. The one they proclaimed as Lord was Jewish. The church in its corporate worship and organization was strikingly similar to the Jewish synagogue. This is why Jn. 4:22 has Jesus saying, "Salvation is of the Jews." Neither Jesus nor the early church would have ever said that about the Greeks or Romans.

And yet but a fraction of the Jews became Christians. The earliest enemies to the new faith were not as much the Romans as the Jews. This points up how disadvantaged Christianity was as a new religion among the old and politically powerful cultures of the world, which had their own religions. Persia gave its support to Zoroastrianism and India gave its allegiance to both Hinduism and Buddhism. Confucianism was identified with China, then one of the great empires.

The Greeks supported many religions, whether the Eleusian mysteries or such cults as Mithra and Dionysius, and with these the Christian faith had to compete. If we identify Christianity with Israel, it could be only as a minority religion, and even so Israel as an obscure people did not compare with the great ancient empires. The Christian faith had to find its strength in something more than great world empires. True, it eventually became the official religion of the Roman Empire, but this was not until the fourth century, beyond the time of "the early church" and the era of its greatest power.

We remind ourselves in this series that the New Testament did not produce the early church, but it was the early church that produced the New Testament. To understand the New Testament, therefore, we do well to understand the climate in which the church emerged. If the Greeks and Romans were tutors unto Christ, we need to know something of what they contributed. If the Christian faith is "the culmination of Judaism," as it is sometimes put, then we need to understand the Jewish foundations. Already we have seen that the Romans provided law and order, international highways, security of land and sea,

and political unity. The Greeks lent their language, literature, and ideas. The Graeco-Roman world as a whole created a tone and a soul, a hunger for certainty, and a cultivation of mind and spirit that opened hearts to the gospel message. Judaism gave the Person and the faith as well as the characters for the opening drama.

Now that we have some grasp of how the time was made ripe for the invasion of Christ into human history, we are better prepared to move on to our next installment on "The Faith that Made the Difference." —*the Editor*

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DO WE DO WHAT WE DO BECAUSE THE BIBLE SAYS DO IT?

It is an interesting question in that it implies still other questions, such as *What is the purpose of Scripture?* and *What kind of a book* is *the Bible?* Since many of our problems relate to the way we treat the Bible, we should not avoid facing up to such questions.

The question I am asking reminds me of a conversation between a student and me in one of my Ethics classes some years back. I asked the class to name something they believed to be wrong. This student, a bright young lady, replied that she believed stealing to be wrong. "Why is stealing wrong?," I then asked. She responded with "Because the Bible says *Thou shalt not steal.* " When I asked her if the Bible was the basis of her conviction about stealing, she insisted that it was. But when I asked "If the Bible said nothing about stealing would you feel free to steal?," she hesitated but finally admitted that stealing would still be wrong.

The class at last decided that stealing is not wrong because the Bible condemns it but the Bible condemns it because it is wrong. Stealing was wrong before there was a Bible. God wrote into the Ten Commandments legislation against stealing, not to make it a sin, but because it was a sin. Cain killed his brother Abel long before another commandment read *Thou shalt do no murder,* but he was guilty of breaking what might be called "the law of moral reason." No one has to hear the Ten Commandments to know that stealing and murder are wrong. Those commandments rather convict him of what he already knows, and thus condemn him as a sinner. Paul was speaking of still another commandment, *Thou shalt not covet*, when he wrote: "when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died" (Ro. 7:9). The written code reminded him of what was already written in his conscience, but more pointedly and clearly, and thus revived his sense of sin. Law has this function.

I doubt if the apostle would say that he therefore sought to live above covetousness because of what the Bible said to him, but that the Bible (or the commandment) identified him as a sinner because he coveted. Paul would seek not to covet, not so much because of the commandment, but because covetousness is wrong.

Like most of you there are a number of things I do as if they were second nature to me.

I love my wife and family.

I obey the law. I pay my debts.

I go to church. I pray. I do a few good deeds.

I give part of my income to the poor.

The Bible tells me to do everyone of these things. We could all find proof texts. But do I do them because the Bible tells me to — or is there not a better reason? Is there not something wrong when one is motivated by nothing higher than some written code, however esteemed that code may be? Do you want your daughter to marry a man who will love her only because the Bible tells him to?

I love Ouida for many reasons or no reason (love defies reason!) and I can't see that such an injunction as "Husbands, love your wives," which is in the Bible, has much to do with it. I do not love her because the Bible tells me to. I love her because she is Ouida, and the Bible tells me to love her, not to make it right but because it is already right.

The Bible has a way of taking what is right and framing it with Christian urgency, such as "Love your wives, *even as Christ loved the church."* I respond with, "Yes, of course, I love Ouida even as Christ loved the church," though I might never have put it that way except for the Bible. The Scriptures identify this basic moral principle in Eph. 6:1: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." *Because it* is *right!* There may be many reasons why something is right: the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, the sanctity of human personality, the inner sense of duty, moral reason, the authenticity of selfhood, the totality of human experience (in that we learn what is good and evil through trial and error).

For years the state of Alabama had a “reasonable” speed law, and drivers were arrested for exceeding that limitation even though no exact speed limit was posted. We all know that “60” would be reasonable on most highways while “90” would be unreasonable on any highway. And we know that “60” would be unreasonable on a residential street. We know such things just as we know when a child is being abused or a women is being maltreated. It is common moral sense, which God has given all of us. And this is behind much of what the Bible says in reference to the way we are to behave. We are told to do them because it is right to do them —common moral sense.

But there are those things that are uniquely Christian or at least spiritual that may not be mandated by moral reason, such as prayer, study, the corporate assembly, visiting the sick, acts of mercy. Do we do such things because the New Testament requires them or does the New Testament require them because that is the way Christians behave? The difference may be important. The early Christians did these things long before there was a New Testament to tell them to do them. Such behavior grew out of their religious life as Jews, elevated by the example and teaching of Jesus and his disciples. Their experience itself is what eventually became our New Testament.

The experience of the early church was centered in Jesus Christ. While they drew upon their background as Jews (and in some instances as Greeks), the focal point of all that they did was Jesus. Itinerant teachers passed along the growing body of teaching that he left with his chosen envoys, the apostles, and soon documents began to circulate, the letters of Paul being among the first. While such documents served to confirm their faith and deepen their knowledge and to some degree modify their behavior, the “authority” (we can doubt if they thought in such terms) was the mind of Jesus Christ.

Are the Scriptures therefore our “authority” for the things we do? Yes and no. Yes insofar as the Scriptures grew out of the life of the early church and are the testimony of Jesus’ own apostles or those close to them. But the Scriptures are not the *ultimate* authority in that they must always be brought to the judgment bar of our own conscience and our own faith in Christ. Jesus is our authority, and so the Scriptures are authoritative insofar as they point to him.

So I would say that ideally we do what we do, not primarily because of the Bible, but because of our faith in Christ. We do what Christians are supposed to do, what Christians have been doing all along through the centuries. If I know my heart, I would die for Christ as a martyr, not because of anything I might quote from Scripture, but because I am committed to Jesus as Lord. The Scriptures of course are an important part of my faith, but

it is Jesus who is the *object* of my faith. The Scriptures strengthen my faith, but so does the life of the church in history, such as the exemplary life of myold Sunday School teacher, the martyrdom of Polycarp, and the stand taken by Luther.

But the Bible is something more than the witness of the church in history in that it is "God-breathed" or inspired, 2 Tim. 3:16, a reference to the Old Testament in particular, and this is what makes all the Bible "the holy Scriptures," which is what Jesus and his apostles called the Bible and what we should call it. The Bible never calls itself "the Word of God," for Jesus is the Word of God and the Word of God is revealed and reflected in the Scriptures, but is not to be identified with the Scriptures. We all of course can and do refer to the Scriptures as the Word of God in that God speaks to us through them, but we are to know that the Word of God existed in eternity long before the Scriptures and it will continue into eternity, long after the Scriptures cease to be.

The role of Scripture is clearer to us when we see them as more descriptive than prescriptive. In the New Testament, for instance, we have a description of what the early Christians did. The message is not that we are to do precisely as they did (prescriptive), but we are to do for our time what they did for theirs (descriptive). If the order of worsillp, polity, methods and missions are all spelled out in detail (prescriptive), then the church in every age should be a determined uniformity, and no excuse for diversity. But even with the New Testament churches there was diversity in all these areas (descriptive).

The communism (is that the word?) of the Jerusalem church (Acts 5) is an example of what I mean. If it is prescriptive, then every church in every age should do as they did. But if it is descriptive, it serves as an example of how they cared for each other, and so we should find ways, as circumstances demand, to show like care but not necessarily in the same way.

Perhaps the holy Scriptures in some instances may be thought of as prescriptive, such as its mandate for loyalty to the risen Christ, or we can say they certainly issue commands, such as to be baptized, but I do not see the Bible as ever prescriptive in the sense of a "prescription" that one takes to a drugstore. Nor does the Bible take on the likeness of a "Constitution" (as if with articles and sections?) or as a fixed "Pattern," ideas that are often imposed upon it. The Bible is simply not that kind of book.

I see the holy Scriptures, particularly the New Testament, as largely experiential, reflective of the life and faith of the early church and somehow inspired by the Holy Spirit. It tells us both the good and bad about the earliest churches, not one of which is the ideal

for us today. But out of their triumphs and defeats, their rights and wrongs, and apostolic efforts to apply mid-course corrections, we have norms and principles for the ongoing Church of Christ upon earth. Moreover the documents the earliest believers passed on to us show us what it meant to them for Christ to be with them and in them "even unto the end of the age."

We do what we do because we too are Christians and Jesus is with us as he was with them. It is faith in a living Christ that motivates us. We are the ongoing church, believing and doing as the church always has. The Scriptures undergird, strengthen, and deepen that faith. Since the faith could conceivably have been perpetuated by oral tradition through the centuries as it was in the first, it could be argued that while the New Testament is crucial to our faith it is not absolutely necessary.

It is enough to say with the apostle Paul that the Scriptures are *profitable,* and he tells how: "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). —*the Editor*

The Bible is to us what the star was to the wise men; but if we spend all our time in gazing upon it, observing its motions, and admiring its splendor, without being led to Christ by it, the use of it will be lost to us. - *Thomas Adams*

Sink the Bible to the bottom of the ocean, and still man's obligation to God would be unchanged. He would have the same path to tread, only his lamp and his guide would be gone; the same voyage to make, but his chart and compass would be overboard. —*Henry Ward Beecher*

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WHEN A CHURCH OF CHRIST CHANGES ITS NAME

Ours is a world of change, and that includes the churches, including Churches of Christ. Oddly enough, we have a number of churches that are concerned about the name we have always worn, the Church of Christ. Being strongly biblical as a people, we have insisted that the church of the New Testament has many names, but we have nonetheless, as a group separated from others of our heritage, the Christian Churches and Disciples of Christ, denominated ourselves by but one of those biblical names, the Churches of Christ.

I presume that makes us a denomination since that is what denomination means, to be denominated, but that is not the point of this essay. I am writing about those changing Churches of Christ who have grown uneasy over their denominational appellation.

Some have long since dropped the name Church of Christ and are simply known as "chapel" or "church," such as Dunn Rd. Chapel in St. Louis and Random Rd. Chapel in Arkansas City, Ks., and Southwest Church in Dallas and Brook Valley Church in Atlanta. Some of these might now have only marginal interest in any connection with Churches of Christ, if any at all. This would surely be true of one of the oldest Churches of Christ in Nashville, the Belmont Church, which is now also "instrumental," for they would probably repudiate any connection with what they once were.

On the other hand, one of the "most changed" of our churches, the Arcadia Church of Christ in Arcadia, Ca., also now "instrumental" (only a guitar!) is pleased to remain a Church of Christ. So with our congregation here in Denton, Texas, though we use the device of naming our facility the Christian Fellowship Center, so if one of our members does not want to be "Church of Christ," she can simply say she attends the Christian Fellowship Center. We are also acappella in our corporate worship, so our Church of Christ visitors are comfortable enough. The other name on our sign does not disturb them so long as "Church of Christ" is there, and they adjust fairly well to our more "open" type service.

An interesting case of what might be called "the name change trauma" is the Quail Valley Church of Christ in Houston, which only recently became simply Quail Valley Church (though their sign will also bear some such motto as "Lifting Up Christ"). Since this step was a painful one for them, an ordeal stretching over many months of discussion and prayer, it might prove helpful to the rest of us to know some of the facts of the case, whether we are bothered with the name we wear or not.

Jim Bevis, a minister in that church, was for many years with the Brook Valley Church in Atlanta, so he has been out on the growing edge of change for a long time. I have listened to his one-hour tape that tells the story of how the Quail Valley Church of Christ became the Quail Valley Church, and it is a story that deserves a place in the history of our people. It may be a story that will be repeated many times by other of our churches in years to come.

The thesis that challenged the leadership at Quail Valley was whether or not being a "Church of Christ" best represented the mission of that church. Since they were longtime Church of Christ folk (Jim Bevis himself a member for 40 years), it was with agonizing prayer and study that they finally broke this connection. And that is the way to put it, for they have not simply repainted a sign but no longer want to be affiliated, however loosely, with the Churches of Christ. Still they claim to be a church of Christ after the order of the New Testament, but not a part of what Jim chooses to call "the denominational Church of Christ."

Speaking for the church and the elders, Jim Bevis gave the reasons for this change, and if the rest of us are interested in "getting our act straight" we will heed the reasons for this wholesale walkout. Is it sectarian to say that we have lost a church? Perhaps not if we admit that the Lord has not necessarily lost one.

I noted ten charges against the Churches of Christ from the tape, and I will list them with a brief description. If they are serious enough to lead a Church of Christ to cease being a Church of Christ, should they not demand our attention?

1. *The Church of Christ believes in a domesticated God.* This was named as "a very serious difference" between Quail Valley and Churches of Christ, for they see the rest of us as believing in a God who is no longer active in people's lives, while they believe in a miracle-working God.

2. *The Church of Christ believes in a limited Christ.* He is *not* the same yesterday, today and forever in that he can't do what he did then.

3. *The Church of Christ is wrong in its teaching about the Holy Spirit.* We believe the Holy Spirit wrote the New Testament and then retired, while they believe he dwells in the heart and is active in the life of the believer.

4. *The Church of Christ believes in salvation by works.* We may deny it, but still we teach it. Jim sees the Church of Christ failure to distinguish between the gospel and doctrine as responsible for this, for even being right about instrumental music is made part of the gospel, so we must be right even in these things to be saved.

5. *The Church of Christ believes it is the only true church and that they are the only Christians.* Jim concedes he believed this for many years and insists that it is the "general" belief of our people, though there are now many exceptions. This radical exclusivism that

disfranchises other Christians seems to be reason enough why Quail Valley wanted out. About one-half of their members are non-C of C in background, and when they visited other Churches of Christ they would bombard the leadership with "Is that what we are supposed to believe?"

6. *The Church of Christ emphasizes externals to the neglect of the heart.* While we stress the right name, right baptism, right day for Communion, right way of doing things, we do *not* stress the mission of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart or a love for all Christians. Jim Bevis' refers often to his long ministry in the Church of Christ when he had nothing to learn from others since he already had all the answers. Referring to his discovery of the Spirit, he made an interesting observation: "If people are weak on the Holy Spirit they are weak on the nature of the spiritual warfare." Jim indicates that for many years he did not know who the enemy was.

7. *The Church of Christ believes in but one baptism and that is water baptism.* At Quail Valley they teach the baptism of the Holy Spirit, though they may not be what we would call a "charismatic" church. Even on water baptism, Jim says that only in recent years has he learned that baptism represents what God has already done in the heart.

8. *The Church of Christ believes in a "Restoration Movement" that implies that the church ceased to exist and then was restored, and the Church of Christ is that restored church.* Bevis believes the church has always existed, as per Jesus' promise that it would, but that it always needs reformation. Quail Valley now apparently has no interest in a "Restoration Movement".

9. *The Church of Christ does not plead for biblical unity but for sectarian conformity*. While we talk about unity we are the most divided church of all, and this is because we equate "understanding alike" with unity. Jim tells how he discovered brotherhood with a minister in the Christian Church and said to him: "Can you believe that an organ has separated us all these years?"

10. *The Church of Christ preaches a message that has no power*. We may have a form of godliness but we deny the power thereof. Jim said he prayed that the Lord would show him a good illustration of this point for his presentation. That very day the mail brought a copy of an ad run in a Ft. Worth paper by the Churches of Christ offering a $1,000 reward for proof that God works miracles today. That did it! Jim says he wants no part with a people that dares to tell the world what God can and can't do.

So, the Quail Valley Church of Christ took down its sign and put up a different one, which is the most visible thing a church can do who wants out. We do not even have a Yearbook to which a church can demand, *Remove our name!* But Quail Valley not only changed signs and letterheads, they called a public meeting and told why. They concluded it would be unfair to Churches of Christ for them to go on claiming to be what they are not, and unfair to their own people for Church of Christisms to be imposed upon them.

They concede that the charges they level do not apply to all Churches of Christ and that many of us see things more or less the way they do. Neither do they say that other Churches of Christ should do as they have done, but only that this is what they believe they should do, their mission being what it is.

I disagree with Quail Valley's decision in that we all have come from somewhere, and that it is best that we stay where we are and be what we believe our people should be. The "stay where you are" approach is what reformation is all about, whether it be an individual in a stuffy church or a church in a stuffy denomination. A Baptist church that wants for the world the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, a vision that would become us all, could probably contribute more toward that vision by remaining a "Baptist" church, at least in name. This would enable them to minister more effectively to Baptists and thus move them toward a catholic view of the Body of Christ. If enough of this happens in all the denominations, this may be the Father's way of answering our Lord's prayer for the unity of all God's people.

If you leave, where do you go? If to another denomination, what is really gained? If not to another denomination, the only option left is to be an independent church, cut off from one's roots like a cut flower. I am convinced we lose when we ignore history, when we act as if it does not matter what has happened to the church in past generations. To assume that we can start over from scratch, just like that, is to be unrealistic. We are what we are, good and bad, because of what the church of yesteryear has passed along to us, our own individual denominations, and we should labor to maximize the good and minimize the bad and thus work for the unity of God's church on earth, *where we are*.

As for me, I thank God for my heritage in the Church of Christ and I am not about to leave. I know where we have come from and I am convinced that we have betrayed our heritage. I don't believe in a "Restoration Movement" because Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone did not, and I agree almost 100% with Quail Valley in the charges they make against us, which to me is all the more reason for staying! To me it would be a cop out not

to stay and fight for those changes that will make the Church of Christ what she ought to be as a denomination *in protest,* witnessing to the church at large for that one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

I cannot of course insist that all others in the Church of Christ do as I have resolved to do. But I wish they would, for if all our renewal-minded folk leave where does that leave us in terms of renewal? Renewal, like charity, begins at home. Most will stay, and down the road there will be victory, believe me. If you could read my mail, you *would* believe me! —*the Editor*

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Life in the Church of Christ . . .

A STEP OF FAITH OFF THE "DEEP END"

William L. Smith

I am on a journey. And I'll not turn back, because the Way is bright, the Guide's voice sounds clear and His hand is firm and faithful. Growing up in the church, I have known these facts to be true. But only recently have I come to live and experience them.

Those like me have been called "misfit" and "malcontent" by some Church of Christ brothers. I now believe things not generally accepted by the church of my upbringing. Among these beliefs are that the Holy Spirit is an active and powerfully dynamic force in the life of a yielded believer and that, when I pause at the Lord's Supper to discern the Body, my heart must embrace many more believers than those within the formidable walls of our group.

Do I then discard my 32 years with the Church of Christ as if I were on the outside? Not at all. I still believe in the basic principles of the American restoration movement. As a product thereof, I have learned to love and be loved and to share in good works, and, I have been taught that the Bible means what it says. There is no division here. We all remain under the headship of Jesus.

In Ohio the counties are divided into "townships," each with its own trustees, police and fire department, and school district. At the sporting events there is fierce competition, with each township proclaiming its supremacy. That is how I now view the church, as one large body of believers, with the Church of Christ as one township thereof. The wall that separates the Church of Christ from the others is artificial, like a line on a map.

I was not the first in the Church of Christ to see things this way. Pat Boone was among the first of a growing number who have this more open view. When his book, "A New Song," hit the brotherhood, they called it "going off the deep end." How appropriate, for going off the deep end is truly a step of faith. My experience may help others in one of two ways. They can see where I have erred and avoid the path I have taken, or, if they see they must change, they can take comfort in the fact that there is abundant life beyond the artificial walls.

At Abilene Christian College I watched as scholars scurried to craft a case against speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts. For some reason it was tongues more than other spiritual gifts that put them on the attack. I learned back in those days that if I could not deal with a matter constructively I could always rely on the big put-down by the use of levity and sarcasm. I was chief among those in Edwards dormitory who found late night comedy on Pat Robertson's "700 Club." We roared with laughter as Pat announced yet another miraculous healing. We had it all figured out. Only fools believed such things. I was weak back then, even though folks in Ohio regarded me as a fine product of the youth program.

Back in Ohio ten years later the boy model became the adult leader. Respectability was mine in the offices of church treasurer, songleader, teacher and camp counselor. Though I would not admit it, I was still weak. It was at this time that my wife, Derri, sensing there must be more to being a Christian, began a study of the Holy Spirit. This led me to wonder what I would do if she went off the deep end. Would I be able to laugh off my wife as I had Pat Robertson?

Derri came to believe that *all* the promises of John 14 and Acts 2 regarding the Holy Spirit apply to her. Since this threatened my respectability in the Church of Christ, I began a desperate search for solid answers, which included a study of every scripture concerning the Holy Spirit.

In time we both privately experienced what we can describe only as a baptism of the Holy Spirit. This experience was so foreign to us that we did not know if we should share it with the congregation. We resolved that, short of being deceitful, we would for the time being tell no one but a few close friends. We wanted to see if God would do through us what he had promised in Acts 2. Any doubt we had was soon buried in an avalanche of blessing, including healing of my arthritis and deliverance from a reading disability. In addition to such physical blessings, the Lord turned our selfish hearts away from

materialism, so that we can now understand what “My yoke is easy” and “I am with you always” really mean. Old songs like “Standing on the Promises” and “Listening to the Spirit’s Call” now have new meaning.

We were nonetheless anxious about telling our elders what had happened to us, but this was solved when we became members of the Belmont Church in Nashville, a church that invites the Spirit not only to impart its fruit but its gift of holiness as well. This church is a refuge for many Church of Christ people who seek a spirit of freedom not found in mainline congregations. Once we were at Belmont we were convinced that God had brought us there for a purpose. This was confirmed by his giving us a new job and a new life in Nashville. We do not see all this as a rejection of our life in the Church of Christ as much as the leading of the Holy Spirit.

While Derri was frustrated by the limited ministry of women in the church, she is now a full-time coordinator in Belmont’s well-funded and multi-faceted inner-city ministry. God’s blessings truly do abound beyond what we can hope or imagine. Even in our sufferings there are blessings. We are still weak, but, praise God, we are learning that “He is strong.”

Some of our Church of Christ brothers are bothered by our witness. They regard our talk of God working in us as a way to glorify ourselves or to make them feel inadequate. We know God and man cannot be glorified at the same time. Those in whom God works will testify, those who forbid God to work will not.

God, through His Holy Spirit, wants to unite us with each other and with all believers. If we earnestly seek Him beyond traditional molds and if we allow the Spirit to do with us whatever He desires, we will have a solid basis for the unity of the Spirit, even with diversity of doctrine. *—106 Eastland Ave., Lebanon, TN 37087*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

Here is a rare statement for a Church of Christ bulletin: “We want to have more of an emphasis on the musical gifts that the Lord has placed within our body (both instrumental and vocal). If you play any type of instrument or sing and would like to participate in this ministry, please see Stan or Ken.” That comes from the Arcadia Church of Christ, Arcadia,

Ca., which now uses an instrument (guitar) for its congregational singing. It is the only church I know of that explicitly remains a Church of Christ and uses an instrument. Two others, Belmont in Nashville and Quail Valley in Houston also use an instrument, but while they were once clearly Churches of Christ they might not make that profession now not on their signboards at least! This is an interesting development among us. Will we be so sectarian as to say a church cannot truly be a Church of Christ and have an instrument? I had rather say something like it cannot be a true church if it is not Spirit-filled, or if it does not manifest the abiding fruit of faith, hope and charity —or if it is not truly catholic! But *must* it be acappella?

Word from Miami, Florida indicates that the Churches of Christ in that changing city, which is now 50% Hispanic, are in trouble. The old Central Church of Christ, longtime one of our leading churches, has a "For Sale" sign in the yard and the congregation is apparently disbanding. The churches once had an extensive Christian school operation, but most or all of this is now in the hands of others. The explanation given to me is that our sectarian, exclusivistic attitude could not survive in such a changing environment.

We all know of "old faithful," the Sixth and Izzard Church of Christ in Little Rock. Not to be outdone by others, its elders are also now being sued. A deacon, who has been a member of the church for 45 years, is asking the court to order the elders to disclose the church's business affairs, but he is asking for no money and there is no implication of wrongdoing. He just wants to know what is going on. He asks for an audit and an account of a recent elder election. The elders who function as a "board of directors" contend that they are under no obligation to provide the congregation with such information, which involves not only church donations but parking lot rentals, income from a day school, and interest on savings account. Such authoritarian rule of a handful of men in a sizeable congregation, which is supposed to be a democratic and free society, is going to be the undoing of many Churches of Christ if drastic changes are not made in our "elderships." Can you imagine true "shepherds of the flock" behaving in such a way that a longtime member, who has given of his income for 45 years, has to go to court to find out what is going on in his own church?

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BOOK NOTES

If we can think of a good book as written by a good man, then Lynn Hieronymus' *What the Bible Says About Worship* more than qualified, for the author is such a fine person. Beyond that, this book is both entertaining and informative, drawing deeply both from Scripture and our own heritage. One-third of the book is a "Special Study" on Alexander Campbell and the Hymn book, and the whole of the book draws heavily on our heritage in worship. And yet the biblical norms are not neglected, not even the worship of the synagogue. We highly recommend this book as well worth the price tag of 13.50.

A Documentary History of Religion in America by Edwin S. Gaustad is in two volumes, the first goes to the Civil War, the second since 1865. It allows you to read the documents that made American religion, with appropriate introductions to them, such as William Penn's treaty with the Indians, the Puritans' founding of Harvard so that there would not be "an illiterate ministry," and Alexander Campbell's essay on Christian unity. The author mistakes Campbell's second wife for the first one (Selina always had that problem!) in an accompanying photo, but he can be excused for that. If you want to know history, this is the way to study it, the documents themselves, with a little help on how they came about. I suggest you get the first volume first, and then move on to the second. Over 500 pages each, they are well worth 16.95 each, which is postpaid if prepaid.

You will delight in Michael Green's *The Day Death Died,* a thin paperback on the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. 3.85 postpaid.

For 15.00 we will send you a five-pack of C.S. Lewis' most seminal writings: *Miracles, The Great Divorce, The Screwtape Letters, The Problem of Pain, Mere Christianity.* If you have not read Lewis, here is the place to both start and end. You will be both impressed and edified.

Several titles by our own folk in Churches of Christ deserve to be read, some new, some old. New is Olan Hicks' *In Search of Peace, Unity, and Truth* (3.95). Not yet old is Waymon Miller's *The Role of Elders* (3.95). Old but still new is K. C. Moser's *Gist of Romans* (5.95). Moser's *The Way of Salvation* (5.95) is also still in print. We stock these books because they are liberating material, all of them, pointing our people in a new direction, away from sectarianism and authoritarianism to catholicity and freedom. Don't give up on us until you have read these books. Still another new title from our own ranks and equal to the others is Cecil Hooks' *Free in Christ*, which you will have to order from him, and I urge you do so. It is distributed free but I suggest you send 2.00 for postage and handling. Address:1350 Huisache, New Braunfels, Tx. 78130.

Our own story of our people, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of Three Churches* is now in its second printing and is still making friends and influencing people. The price is 21.95 postpaid, but for a special deal see box below.

You will be impressed with the bound copies of this journal in matching volumes back to 1977 (earlier ones are no longer available), with colorful dustjackets. Principles of Unity and Fellowshipo (1977) and The Ancient Order (1978), single volumes, are 5.95 each. Blessed Are The Peacemakers and With All The Mind (1979-80) and Jesus Today (1981-82), double volumes, are 9.00 each. Prepaid only please. the bound volume for 1983-84, entitled The Doe of the Dawn, should be ready by spring.

You can help circulate this journal through our club rate for four or more names (no limit) at 3.00 per year per name. You send us the names and we do the mailing. Bundle rates to one address is the the same rate. Some of our most appreciative readers are those who were introduced to the journal by someone else, so why not give this a chance with some of your friends.

If you send us eight subs (counting your own or your renewal) at 3.00 each (total 24.00), we will send you a free copy of The Stone-Campbell Movement by Leroy Garrett, but you have to request the book.

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READER'S EXCHANGE

The Christian Church and Church of Christ here are working toward friendship and fellowship. One used the other’s building for a special program and now are sharing in a film series. Plans are to do a VBS together. It is just a beginning, but it is exciting. *—Dale Valentine, Hays,Ks.*

Well, you’ve done it again! Your Nov. issue left my blood boiling because I consider the doctrine of reincarnation and universalism to be demonic deceptions straight from the pit of hell. *—David Reagan, McKinney, Tx.*

(The first sentence at least sounds like a Reagan! Wouldn’t it be something if Dave Reagan were the reincarnated Amos? Dave, of course, is a great and insightful student of the word, and I have the greatest respect for his opinions. Reincarnation may be wrong (probably is), but the fact that it has been believed by multiplied millions for centuries is

reason enough to give it respectable consideration. An idea can be wrong without being demonic —and does every error have to come from the pits of hell? And might some things be partly right even when wrong? --*Ed.)*

I liked your recent article about "The Truth" very much. I'm glad that Jesus said that He is "the truth" so I won't be deluded into thinking that I have "the truth" in my understanding of Scripture passages. But I must search the Scriptures constantly for what is *true* regardless of how many times I must change my mind. It has been said "If a man is *honest* he can not help what he believes, but his search for truth must never end." —*Elizabeth*

What is a "Cosmic" Christ? Wow! Shades of *Star Wars!* Are you ever up-todate! - *Chuck Dickens, Exeter, Ca.*

(Since others have questioned my reference to our Lord as the cosmic Christ, I will suggest that while the term is not explicitly biblical, the idea is surely there if we allow cosmic to mean, as per the dictionary, embracing the entire universe (cosmos) and more, as in Eph. 1:10 where the Christ is referred to as "a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth," and in Jn. 1 where the Christ as the eternal Logos is seen as not only identical with God but creator as well and the source of all life and light. Even now in heaven with God he is of two worlds or dimensions: being human, he is of the earth; being God, he is of heaven or the universe, *cosmic*. —*Ed.*)

Thank you for keeping us thinking. —*Harold and Georgia Fritz, Waynesville, Mo.*

We have a large class on Sunday morning for Restoration history with an excellent elder-teacher. I was pleased to hear him recommend your history book as his favorite. He says the subject has been a hobby of his for 20 years. Exciting things are happening these days! Such as Rubel Shelley being here. —*M. Donat, Cujahoga Falls, Oh.*

In Response to "The Six Days of Creation"

I would like to respond to Cecil Hook's article entitled "The Six Days of Creation."

He stated that he feels "well-meaning teachers do our children a disservice" by teaching that God created the universe in six literal days. He argued that such teaching puts a "scientific stumbling block" in the path of our children's faith.

I disagree, and I think I can prove that Cecil is wrong. One of the members of the Board of Trustees of the ministry I serve is a research scientist for a worldwide oil company. He earned his doctorate in Geophysics from Stanford University, studying under five Nobel prize winners. He entered Stanford as an atheist. He graduated a believer in Jesus. The interesting thing is that his study of science not only led him to faith in Jesus,

but it led him to accept the Genesis account of creation to mean exactly what it says — creation in six literal days. He believes that instantaneous creation in six literal days is a better *scientific* explanation of the universe than is the theory of creation by evolution over millions or billions of years.

Over two thousand other scientists agree with him. They are members of the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego, California. They have doctorates stacked on top of doctorates and see no scientific problem in accepting the literal nature of the Bible's creation story and its attendant corollary of a young earth.

Cecil also states in his article that "whether God took a moment or billions of years is neither revealed or relevant. " Again, I disagree. First the time He took is revealed in the Genesis account and then is reaffirmed in the presentation of the Ten Commandments, as recorded in Exodus 20:8-11. In that passage we are told that we are to work six days and rest one because "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day."

Second, the method of creation is relevant, for if God created through a lengthy process of directed evolution then He used a method that violates His character, for evolution is a cruel process of dog eat dog and survival of the fittest. Theistic evolution also violates the scriptures in that it postulates the existence of death in the world long before the fall of Adam and Eve. The Word teaches that the creation was perfect until the fall of Adam and Eve at which point death entered the scene and the curse was placed upon the universe.

Theistic evolution turns the Biblical process upside down. It postulates order evolving out of chaos. The Bible reveals a perfect creation which was subjected to the curse due to the sin of Man and which has been in bondage to decay ever since that time. In other words, the Bible pictures order disintegrating into chaos, with Jesus ultimately returning to redeem the whole creation by lifting the curse and liberating it from its bondage to decay. (Rom. 8:18-25)

Anyone who wants the scientific testimony on tape can get it by sending $4.00 and asking for the tape, "Science and the Bible. —*David Reagan, P. O. Drawer K, McKinney, TX 75069*

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